

Aiken Canyon Loop Trail- Colorado Springs

Direction to trailhead: Follow US-50 East for about 20 miles to CO-115. Take the CO-115 exit toward Penrose/Colorado Springs. Turn left onto CO-115 North then continue for 18 miles to Turkey Canyon Ranch Road. Turn left onto Turkey Canyon Ranch Road and continue for about 0.2 miles to Aiken Canyon Preserve Park on your right (east). About 27.8 miles one way from Canon City

Length of hike: 3.86 miles (round trip)

Difficulty: Moderate

Beginning elevation: 6472 feet

Elevation change: 380 feet

Description:

The park is named after Charles Aiken, U.S. surveyor and ornithologist who surveyed this region in the 1870's. The trailhead is near the Nature Conservancy field station with informative signs about this preserve. This is a pretty trail that takes you through a variety of ecosystems climbing steadily for about 1.9 miles where you reach the highest elevation of 6848 feet (Figure 1). The trail then steadily loses elevation as you head back down to the trail head. There are informative signs about the park's ecology, geology and animal life along the first part of the trail, although most of the signs are hard to read because of severe weathering.

The first part of the trail goes along a dry stream bed, then takes you through open grasslands (Figure 2) and around islands of scrub oaks with interspersed junipers and groves of mountain mahogany with their characteristic long, curled seed pods (Figure 3). The trail crosses stream beds several times along the way (Figure 4). After about 0.7 miles the trail splits. Stay to the right. After about 0.3 miles you will see a side trail to the right. This trail takes you into a steep, narrow canyon and up to the remains of an old cabin about one mile above. As you continue north on the loop trail tall ponderosa pines will become more prominent as the trail gains in elevation. After 1.79 miles of hiking you will come to another side trail to the right (east). This short trail takes you up to the top of the hill where you have excellent views of the grasslands below and mountains further to the south. This is an excellent location to stop for a lunch break or snack and look at the rock outcroppings to the north. Figure 5 is an interesting outcropping seen to the north before you reach the overlook side trail. As you continue south you will travel under mixed forest and open areas, and along and across dry stream beds. After you reach the Y intersection turn south to the trail head and parking area.

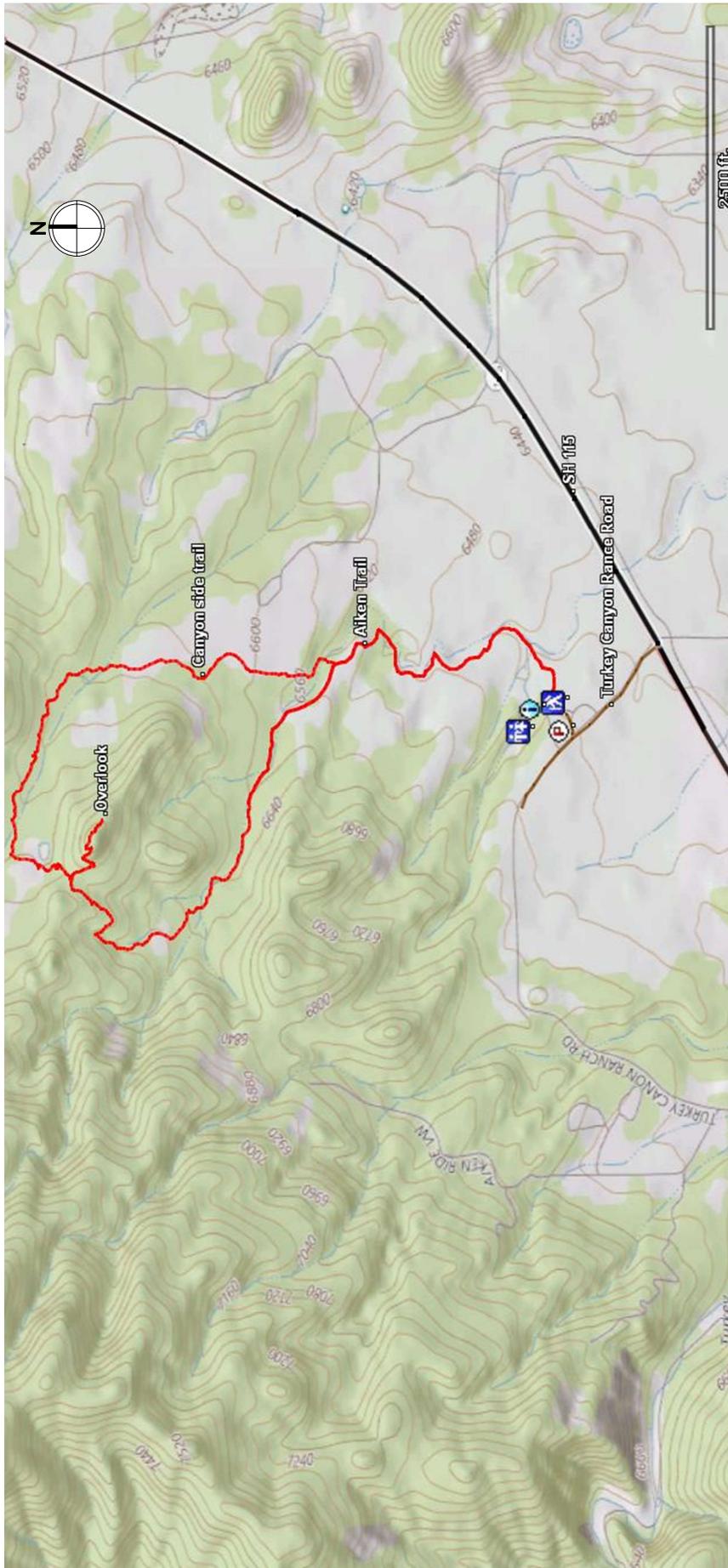


Figure 1. Map of Aiken Valley Loop Trail



Figure 2. Trail crossing open grasslands



Figure 3. Trail crossing shrub lands



Figure 4. Trail crossing dry stream bed

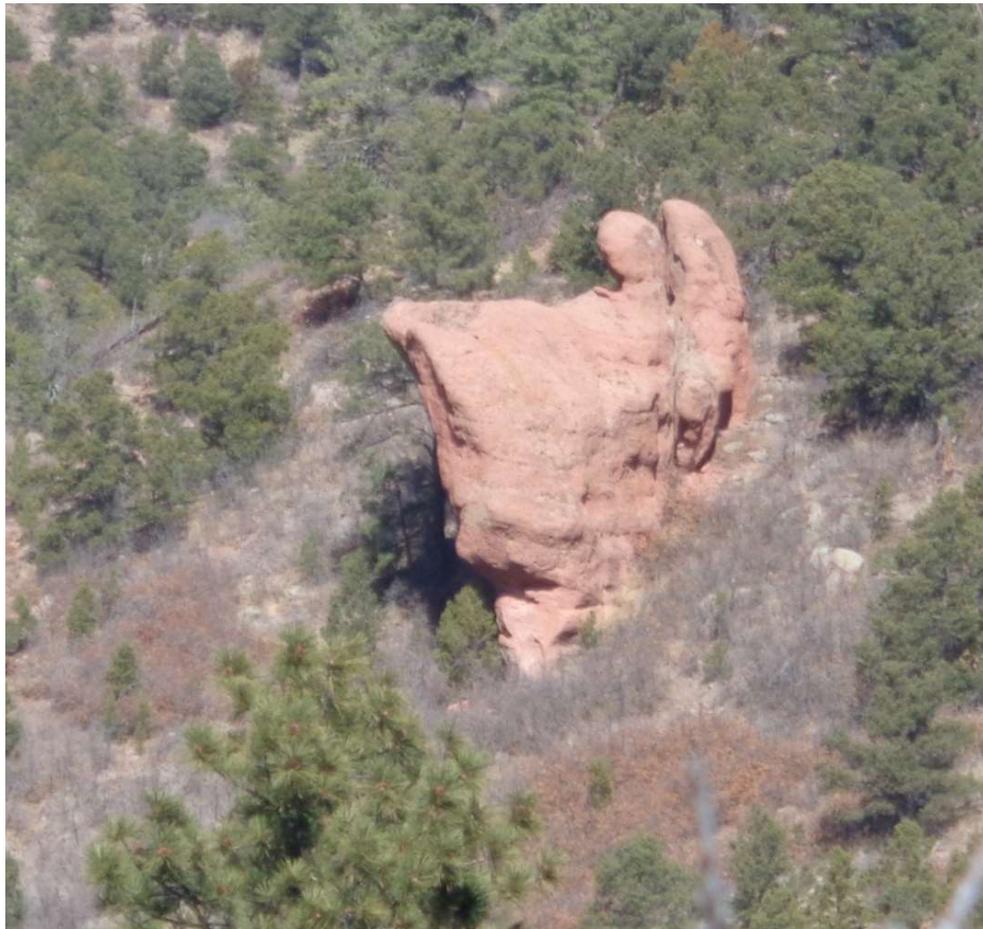


Figure 5. Rock outcropping visible from trail?